


# Gas-tax hike of up to 30 cents a gallon needed, Emanuel and suburban mayors say

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Mayor Rahm Emanuel joined forces with suburban mayors on Tuesday to call for a 20- to 30-cents-a-gallon increase in the state's gasoline tax to bankroll sorely needed mass transit and road improvements.

After that, the mayors argued that the gas tax should be increased every year to match the inflation rate.

At a City Hall news conference Tuesday, Emanuel argued that 24 states have raised their gas tax since 2012 alone. Meanwhile, Illinois is "stuck in neutral" with a state gas tax of 19 cents a gallon that's been frozen since 1990 — even though federal taxes and local and state sales taxes and other fees push the overall tax rate far higher.

The low state motor fuel tax has eroded Illinois geographic advantage as the nation's transportation crossroads, the mayor said.

Even so, consumers are likely to suffer from sticker shock.

"We've tried for 28 years as a state to starve our strength — and it's not working for us. It's time to invest in our strength and have it perform the way it should," Emanuel said.

"We are facing now a historic moment. Our state can't wait any longer. ... We're calling for an increase in the gas tax by 20 to 30 cents [a gallon]. We're also calling on the lawmakers to index it to inflation. If you take the lower range of the 20 cents ... that would just be about equal to what inflation was since 1990. That's just catching up to where we were."

By starting the bidding so high, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus is giving Gov.-elect J.B. Pritzker some room to maneuver. But Emanuel flatly denied that coming in high was a bit like filing an insurance claim. You start high, well aware you will need to settle for something less.

"We're not trying to do it that way. We're trying to actually advance our economies and create jobs. It's not a political strategy. It's actually an economic strategy," he said.

Joe Szabo, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, noted that there is a "\$24 billion deficit" just to maintain and operate the "inadequate" mass transit system that exists today.

Another \$32 billion is needed to make repairs and "modest" improvements to that system, he said.

"We have to seize this moment to stay competitive. ... This has to be about achieving a permanent fix to our chronic transportation funding shortages," Szabo said.

“We’re at a crisis point. The worst thing that we could do now is to settle for a short-term solution that’ll put us back in the same situation five or 10 years from now. We really owe it to the public to not only do this but to do it right.”

The gas tax is not the only suggested source of funding for a transportation bill that, Emanuel believes, could defray at least some of the \$2.3 billion cost to extend the CTA’s Red Line from its terminus at a renovated 95th Street Station all the way to 130th Street.

The mayor also raised the possibility of an increase in license plate fees. And he argued that the state should find some way to require electric cars to pay their fair share.

“Electric cars don’t pay a gas tax, but use the road. They also get a tax subsidy when they buy the car. That is for the user. They should be charged different so they can contribute to the maintenance and modernization of the transportation system,” the mayor said.

He added, “I know you’re gonna focus on the gas tax. But, there’s licenses. Here in Illinois, we have a sales tax on top of a gas tax. But, the sales tax at the pump doesn’t go into transportation. It goes into the state budget. And there’s other revenue sources you can look for — not just the gas tax.”

Jordan Abudayyeh, press secretary for J.B. Pritzker’s transition team, said the governor-elect is “committed to working across the aisle to ensure we get a capital bill that will set Illinois on the right path for years to come.”

Pritzker has already appointed an infrastructure transition committee that will “look at how best to implement a capital plan that leverages as much federal money as possible to bring significant investment to our surface, rail, water, broadband and community infrastructure,” Abudayyeh wrote in an emailed statement.

House Minority leader Jim Durkin is also “open” to a capital bill.

But a spokeswoman said, “Before any funding mechanism can be considered, greater detail on the scope of the program as well as considerable negotiation will be necessary to mitigate the impact on taxpayers.”

*Contributing: Tina Sfondeles*